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Boehner: House to demand spending cuts to avoid default

Positions harden as the partial government shutdown enters second week.

by Fredreka Schouten, USA TODAY

Oct. 6, 2013

WASHINGTON – The partial government shutdown headed into its second week with no sign of resolution to the bitter stalemate as key Republicans in Congress on Sunday linked the current budget impasse to the looming confrontation over a potential default on the nation's debt.

House Speaker John Boehner said he would not allow the GOP-led House to move forward with a bill to increase the government's borrowing authority without broader talks about curbing federal spending.

"I don't want the United States to default on its debt," the Ohio Republican said on ABC's *This Week*. "But I'm not going to raise the debt limit without a serious conversation about dealing with problems that are driving the debt up. "

President Obama, he said, "is risking default by not having a conversation with us."

Asked how the stalemate would end, Boehner said: "If I knew, I would tell you."

The government will reach the limit of its borrowing authority on Oct. 17, and Obama has called for lawmakers to pass a bill increasing the limits with no conditions attached.

Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew called it "reckless" and "dangerous" for the federal government to veer so closely to a potential default on the nation's \$16.7 trillion debt.

"On the 17th, we run out of our ability to borrow, and Congress is playing with fire," Lew said on CNN's *State of the Union*.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who led GOP efforts to dismantle Obama's 2010 health care law as a condition of keeping the government open, Sunday outlined three conditions that should be met before Republicans agree to debt-ceiling deal.

"We should look for some significant structural plan to reduce government spending," Cruz said on CNN. "We should avoid new taxes. And, No. 3, we should look for ways to mitigate the harms from Obamacare."

The partial government shutdown began Oct. 1, after Republicans and Democrats failed to reach an agreement on spending bills to keep the government running into the new fiscal year.

House Republicans made dismantling or delaying the health care law a condition of passing a temporary spending bill -- a position rejected by Obama and the Democrats who control the Senate.

In recent days, the House has passed several measures to reopen portions of the government -- most of which have been rejected by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, who is demanding the House vote on a bill to open the entire government without any conditions.

On Sunday, Lew called on the House to vote immediately on a temporary spending measure without linking it to demands on either the health care law or spending cuts. Lawmakers "need to open the government up," he said. "They can do it today."

Boehner, however, said he does not have the votes in the House to pass a stopgap budget measure with no strings attached, despite indications that some moderate Republicans would be willing to join Democrats in passing a so-called "clean" measure to end the shutdown.

The White House challenged Boehner's assertion. "If there are not votes to open the government as Speaker Boehner says, why is so afraid to call the vote and prove it," White House senior adviser Dan Pfeiffer tweeted Sunday.

Republicans insisted Sunday that it was up to Obama to start negotiations to end the impasse. "We're interested in having a conversation about how we open the government and how we begin to pay our bills," Boehner said. "But it begins with a simple conversation."

Obama, he said, "knows what my phone number is."

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